

## The Children's Christmas: An In-between Story

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# **The Children's Christmas: An In-between Story**

by [Aria\\_Cinabun](#)

## Summary

(Takes place after The Children's Rebellion)

It's holiday season, and Tommy is miserable.

Why wouldn't he be? Half of his friends are dead. The other half were basically on suicide watch.

Yay. Merry Christmas.

## Notes

This takes place after the end of The Children's Rebellion.

"You burnt the hot chocolate," Wilbur said.

Tommy looked down at his mug, which was red and beautiful, and sort of reminded him of blood, but whatever. "What? No, I didn't."

"It's literally black."

"Don't discriminate against darker hot chocolate," Tommy sniffed. When he moved the cup in his hands, he could have sworn the liquid—if it could be called liquid—clunked against the side of the cup.

"Hot chocolate is brown. That is *burnt*. That is more burnt than that one piece of toast Sarnap tried to feed Dream."

"Maybe it's built different," he said.

"That's not how this works."

"How would you know?" Tommy scowled. "You're, like, a buzzkill. You wouldn't know about my built-different hot chocolate."

"I think I've made more hot chocolate than you," Wilbur said.

"That's because you're old."

"I was making hot chocolate before you were even *born*."

"It's not my fault that I have a traumatic past," Tommy sniffed. Wilbur blinked at him, seemingly lost for words. "What are you looking at, bitch?"

"You," Wilbur deadpanned. "You, burning your hot chocolate."

Tommy stared at him. Wilbur stared back. Tommy raised an eyebrow.

"Don't do it."

Without missing a beat, Tommy raised the cup to his lips and shotgunned it like he would have done a shot of vodka. If he'd ever had vodka. If he drank alcohol. Which he didn't.

It tasted like someone had rubbed dirt and the physicality of pain into his mouth. It tasted like someone had taken the liquid ass inside his hot chocolate and had abused it as a kid and had never given it love and then executed all its friends and then experimented on it until it couldn't sleep in low places.

His therapist would have said he was projecting onto inanimate objects.

He liked to call it being creative.

His lower lip quivered with the effort to keep his jaw shut. He swallowed it and immediately wanted to die. Like, more than usual.

"That *cannot* have tasted good," Wilbur said, looking both horrified and impressed at the same time.

"Delicious," he said.

It had not been delicious. Tommy was a liar. And a damn good one.

"What's going on here?"

Tommy turned, a wide grin on his face as he saw Phil standing there, black wings neatly tucked into his back. "Philza Minecraft, the greatest Elytrian ever—"

"Have you been feeding him drugs?" Philza asked, looking past him towards Wilbur.

"He does not need drugs to be like that," Wilbur muttered, shoving his hands in his pockets.

"Right," Tommy said seriously. "Only trauma." He tapped his mug with his good hand—the only hand that he could properly hold a mug with. "And burnt hot chocolate. Can I have more?"

"That *cannot* have been good for you," Phil said, and wow, the old people all have the same sayings. "Burnt, you say? And you let him have it?" His eyes were narrowed in on the bitch behind Tommy.

"I can't stop the gremlin from drinking things he wants to," Wilbur grumbled.

"You're a Lieutenant on this spaceship and six years older, and you *can't take a cup from a child?*"

"Well, when you put it that way, it sounds bad."

Tommy snickered.

Phil pointed a finger at Tommy. "Christmas dinner is in twenty minutes. I need you to go collect Purpled and Tubbo from wherever they are, and bring them to the mess hall."

"You act like you didn't have a tracker embedded in our wrists," Tommy said.

Phil raised an eyebrow. "I mean, you could come help with the silverware—"

"Anddddddd that's my cue to leave," Tommy announced, shoving his mug at Wilbur, who sniffed the contents and gagged. "Goodbye, family! See you at dinner! Hahaha!"

"The fuck...?" Phil said, as Tommy speed-walked epicly around the corner.

Putting out silverware? Pfft. He'd rather be caught dead than putting out forks and other stabby things.

He didn't even have to pull out his datapad to message the other two boys to know where they were. Tommy turned left in hallway 67-C and headed over to the elevator, inputting the code with five taps of his right hands' pointer finger.

Before the doors in the elevators shut, a black blur darted in, and Tommy's eyes lit up to see the cat-like dhi'sk—the alien animal they'd picked up months and months ago; also known as his therapy animal. Mellohi meowed at him, white-flecked purple eyes staring up at him almost balefully.

"Hello, girl," he said, kneeling down and gathering her up in her arms. He did not wince when her claws dug into his arm. He did not. He would never. He did not show pain. He was not—

Tommy cut his stupid inner thoughts off as the door opened, and carried Mellohi down the hallway to the atrium, where a boy sat on a darkened bench staring up at the window that showed a galaxy of stars. Tommy sighed quietly and put Mellohi down, ignoring her meow as she scampered off into the grass and trees of the atrium, content to play with greenery that

she rarely saw. He shoved his hands in his pockets and walked over to the brown-haired boy, breathing deeply in the non-recycled air from the giant oak tree that had a single tire swing hanging from one of its branches, blocking part the view of the windowed universe from both the boys.

"Tubbo," he said, sitting down next to the boy. His friend shifted, bringing a knee to his chest and resting a cheek on it. His brown eyes shone from the light of a thousand stars as he turned his head to look at Tommy, but didn't open his mouth. "It's almost dinner time." Tubbo didn't respond. "You should come eat with us. It's Christmas." He bit his tongue and didn't say that it was his first Christmas with a real family, no matter what had happened in his past.

"I don't want to," Tubbo muttered.

"I know," he said, his heartstrings tugging at the sorrowful expression on his friends' face. "I know you don't."

There was a pause in the conversation. Tommy tried to find the words to convey his sadness. Tubbo stared into space.

A hand clamped down on the back of the bench the two were sitting down, and Tommy was ten yards away as the tiny tremors finished throughout the seat, eyes narrowed and pulling at the place where a knife had used to lie. Tubbo had a phaser out and had pointed it out at their attacker's head before he'd even had the chance to make a sound.

"You can put the gun down, Tubbo," Purpled spoke up, reaching up with a finger, slightly cross-eyed as he pushed the barrel of the gun away from the bridge of his nose. The brown-haired boy snorted, but made the phaser disappear with a flourish of his hands. "Jesus, I thought I was going to *see* Jesus."

"I thought you were agnostic," Tommy said, pacing closer.

"I thought you were part-bird, not part-bunny," the magenta-eyed boy retorted. "But from seeing you jump from here to there, I must've been mistaken."

"Shut up," Tommy snorted, flicking Purpled's arm. "I was going to go look for you."

"Good thing I have your location at all times," he said, pointing at the datapad attached to his utility belt.

Tommy squinted at him. "I'm trying to decide if that's creepy or cool."

"Why not both?"

"I'm trying to be depressed in peace," Tubbo snapped. "Why can't you two just leave me alone?"

"Oh, Tubso," Tommy said. "Rule number one of the Traumatized Teenagers. Never leave anyone depressed alone." Purpled nodded seriously. "It has negative results."

"You would know, wouldn't you."

"Are you trying to insinuate something?"

"I would never," Tubbo said, cracking a smile.

The three of them fell into silence; Purpled standing behind the two boys sitting on the bench once more.

"You know," Tommy said. "I should have seen this coming."

"What?" Tubbo asked lightly, glancing at him.



"Ranboo," Tommy explained. "Six was always an unlucky number."

"You're saying *my husband was murdered* because *six is an unlucky number*?" Tubbo demanded, sounding strangled.

"Well, when you put it like that, it sounds bad," Tommy muttered, closing his eyes and trying not to think of the boy who was dead—*his friend*; and another person the universe had taken from him.

Man, his life sucked.

"Merry fucking Christmas," Purpled said dryly.

"It's my first one," Tommy said.

"Oh," Tubbo replied. "So that means you've lost your—"

"Do *not* finish that," Tommy and Purpled said in unison. Dutifully, Tubbo shut up, but the corner of his lips turned into a smirk.

"Miss you, Boo," Tubbo eventually said, his words drifting in the quietness of the atrium like the natural oxygen that was produced by the trees. "Wish I could have spent another holiday with you."

"If he were here, he would've said Happy Birthday too," Purpled said, and Tommy blinked.

"It was your birthday yesterday," he said, and it wasn't quite a question.

"Maybe," Tubbo said, and that was definitely a yes.

"There weren't any celebrations..."

"I hacked into the *L'manburg's* registry and removed my birthday from the list," Tubbo explained, tilting his head. "I didn't want to celebrate...alone."

"What am I, chopped liver?" Tommy muttered.

"You know what I mean."

He exhaled sharply. "Yeah. Yeah, I do. I get it. But that doesn't mean I'm going to forget. You're like, eighteen now. You're *old*."

"I'm not *old*," Tubbo snorted.

"Hey, you're the first one of the Traumatized Teenagers to reach the age of adulthood...for their race," Purpled said. "I mean, even though the galactic laws state it's twenty-one, you're basically of age. For your Origin."

"Hey," Tommy protested. "Avians come of age at fourteen, dickhead."

Purpled's eye twitched. "Please do not remind me of that fact. I have elected to ignore it." Tommy tilted his head, and did not say what came to mind next.

A ringtone chimed in the silence that followed.

"Is that Parting Words by Luvbird?" Tubbo demanded. Purpled snorted.

"Shut the fuck up," Tommy said, and answered his comms. "Yes?"

› *Tommy.* ‹

He chuckled nervously. "O-oh! Hi, Niki!" Purpled coughed to cover up his laughter, and Tommy flipped him off.

› *What are you doing right now?* ‹

Tommy panicked. "Drugs," he said, because that was his go-to reply. Wait, he shouldn't have said that, Niki was the Chief Medical Officer and he was literally recovering from drug abuse. "Wait, no. Shit—"

› *THOMAS INNES-MINECRAFT, I SWEAR TO ALL THE STARBORNE YOU BETTER NOT BE—* ‹

"I'm not!" he wailed, holding his comm far away from his body, as if that would stop the shouting from the other end.

Purpled grabbed the comm from his hand. "Don't worry, Lieutenant," he said kindly, and the shouting stopped. "I'm with him. We were just about to leave the atrium."

》 *Thank you, Purpled. And Tommy—* ‹

He froze.

》 *If I find out that you've been doing drugs, then you'll regret ever stepping foot in my medbay. Capiche?* ‹

"Capiche," he muttered. "Got it. Yes. Mm-hmm."

The blinking light turned off, signaling the end of the call. Tommy rubbed his forehead.

"Right," Purpled said. "We should probably get going before Niki murders Tommy."

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Dinner was a sordid affair.

Tubbo didn't talk, which provoked Lani into looking at him with a saddened expression, which made Drista look between the two—and Tommy and Purpled just stabbed at their food and tried to follow the conversation between Wilbur and Dream the two sitting closest to them, which was about galactic relations between the Humans and the Blazeborn or some boring shit like that.

Tommy ignored the looks that his twenty-five other crewmates would occasionally throw the defeated five children on one side of the table. He knew that they were acting odd.

Well, more odd than usual. Not different from the past few months, ever since Ranboo had been murdered—but not their usual rowdy selves, except for a few jokes that were perhaps a bit in poor taste—but Tommy knew that Phil had been hoping that the festivities would improve their moodiness.

The adults hid their grief far better than the children did. Purpled had snooped through the paperwork and had found four letters from anonymous crewmates telling Captain Philza that *child soldiers* should not be aboard the *L'manburg*, no matter how qualified they were.

Fortunately for Phil, he had refused every single one. Where were they to go, anyway? The front line was a dangerous place, but being alone was far more dangerous than this had ever been.

Tommy ate his mashed potatoes because he could not eat the lamb roast and tried to ignore the tears welling in his eyes and mixing into his food. More sodium, anyway.

Everyone ignored the fact that Tubbo divided his plate with a line down the center and only ate everything strictly on the right side.

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Everything felt muted.

Tommy woke up the next morning and opened presents and felt a smile on his face when Techno tried to murder Wilbur for getting him some stupid gag gift present.

But no matter how many times he laughed, no matter how many times he tried to cope with humor; some of it dark, the sadness always came back, like a perpetual cloud that would not stop raining.

Perhaps this had been his final straw. He had been able to cope with his parents dying; his aunt dying. He'd managed to deal with the death of the other members of the Children's Rebellion being executed. He'd just barely managed to deal with Snifferish's death.

Ranboo had sent him tumbling off a cliff into a freefall. He was lost.

So Tommy laughed and sipped his hot chocolate as he watched Wilbur and Techno bicker, but he did not join in. And when nobody was watching him, his smile faded to a frown.

Nobody gave him knives for Christmas, despite him having lost one.

He didn't ask why.

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He did not sleep in his room anymore. Sometimes he woke up in the middle of the night in a temporary group room that had become all but permanent panting and gasping for breath, Ranboo's two-toned eyes fading in front of him, the man that had murdered him's laughter echoing into the darkness of the dreamworld.

He wasn't the only one. Purpled played it off far better than him, but even Tommy saw the sweat the magenta-eyed boy wiped away before he put on his work-face and went to sign paperwork. Tubbo was the worst—the boy had always felt too much, and unfortunately—or fortunately—he hadn't had enough experience to be able to hold in his emotions to get through the day. Tommy had walked in on him multiple times bawling his eyes out in a 'forgotten' corner of the spaceship. He had hurriedly left a couple of times, but sometimes he stayed, silent and a means of support.

Drista had her own demons. They were not always about Ranboo—in fact, they were mostly about her experiences with shooting a crazed Techno after the half-Piglin had attempted to murder her brother. Tommy knew for a *fact* she had refused to touch a gun since that day, despite both Dream and Techno's proddings. Her pride in her aim had all but vanished, and sometimes she would flinch at loud banging sounds.

On Christmas Eve, she had a panic attack from the log popping in a fire and had to be sedated by Niki.

Lani dreamed of blood. The day after Ranboo died, when the *L'manburg* had rescued Techno and Tommy from an ocean planet; the murderer nowhere to be found, she and Niki had saved Dream. The smaller girl had been the one to quite literally hold Dream's skin together while the older nurse sewed him up. Sometimes Tommy saw her looking at her hands as if she expected to see them soaked in blood.

Lani didn't eat cranberry sauce anymore.

Drista didn't fire a gun.

Tubbo didn't eat much.

Purpled hovered too much over Tommy.

And Tommy didn't laugh as much as he had before.

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On December twenty-sixth, the *L'manburg* landed on a vacation planet that was covered in ice and snow.

On December twenty-sixth, Tommy was beamed aboard the planet and saw snow for the first time outside of a theatre, and looked up in awe at the whitened sky and the pale flecks of frozen water drifting down onto the ground.

*Ranboo would have liked this*, he thought.

And then a snowball hit the back of his head, and he spun to see a particularly evil-looking Drista there, another ball of powdery snow in her green-gloved hand. She drew her arm back and threw it at Tommy again, who screeched and dodged to the side.

Before the girl could throw a third, a snowball hit her in the face. Tommy looked towards his savior; Purpled, who nodded at him.

Then it divulged into an all-out war between the girls and the boys, though Drista *totally* carried—and occasionally the Elytrians, who were watching over them, would glide out of the snowy sky and get peppered with snowballs before dumping snow over the five of them and shooting up into the clouds.

He hadn't laughed this much in months.

But eventually, minutes before they were about to leave, as Purpled commed Fundy to beam them aboard the ship, Tommy stepped up to Tubbo's side aboard a snowy hill and stared at the flickering lights of a village miles away at the base of a mountain.

"How can I laugh when he's dead?" Tubbo whispered, loud in the silence of the weather. Nothing echoed out here. "How can I throw snowballs and have fun when he's gone?"

"He would have wanted you to," Tommy responded, because he'd come to that conclusion on his own many years ago.



"How do you know?" Tubbo challenged, and the nastiness in his voice wasn't all directed at Tommy.

"Because you would have wanted *him* to, had your places been switched."

Tubbo had no answer for that.

Philza called their names, and the two boys turned in their place and walked towards home.

Revenge would come, with time.

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